

Pesticide

info

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PESTICIDES



California Department of Pesticide Regulation

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Division of Enforcement and Environmental Monitoring

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Enforcement
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Environmental Monitoring

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Division of Registration and Health Evaluation

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BRANCHES:

Worker Health and Safety

916-445-4222

Medical Toxicology

916-445-4233

Pesticide Registration

916-445-4400

Division of Administrative Services

916-445-4140

Information Technology

916-445-4110

Personnel

916-322-4553

County plays key role in regulating pesticides

The size and diversity of California agriculture require a much more complex partnership between state and local pesticide regulatory authorities than anywhere else in the nation. The Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) works closely with California's County Agricultural Commissioners (CACs), who serve as the primary local enforcement agents for pesticide laws and regulations.

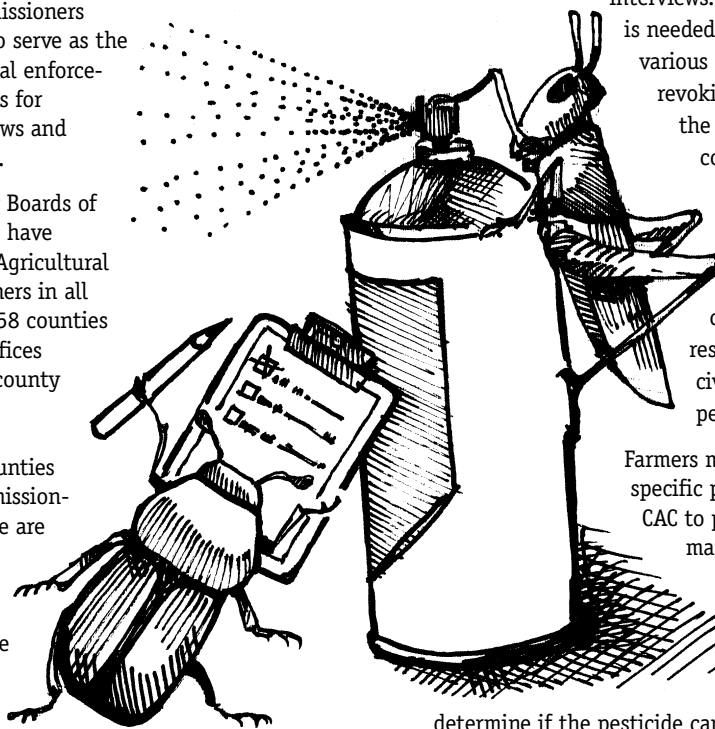
The County Boards of Supervisors have appointed Agricultural Commissioners in all the state's 58 counties to direct offices staffed by county employees. (A handful of small counties share commissioners, so there are fewer than 58 CACs in the State.) CACs receive funding from the State Budget as well as from their own county general funds. Other funding sources are grants, fees and fines. They enforce state laws and regulations that cover environmental protection, pest prevention, worker and consumer protection, and a variety of special services.

CACs seek compliance through education, including presentations to community and industry groups, training sessions for pesticide users, informal or formal compliance actions (such as warning letters), and corrective

interviews. When enforcement is needed, the CAC has various options, including revoking or suspending the right of a pest control company to do business in the county; prohibiting harvest of a crop that contains illegal residues; and issuing civil and criminal penalties.

Farmers must obtain site-specific permits from their CAC to purchase and use many agricultural chemicals. The commissioner must evaluate the proposed application to

determine if the pesticide can be used safely, particularly in sensitive areas, such as near wetlands, residential neighborhoods, schools, or organic fields. State law requires commissioners to ensure that applicators take precautions to protect people and the environment. Based on this evaluation, the CAC may deny a permit to use a pesticide, or may require specific use



practices to reduce any hazards. For example, a permit may be contingent upon the method of application, time of day, weather conditions, and use of buffer zones. When such permit conditions are in place, they have the force of regulation and are strictly enforceable.

Permit Considerations

When issuing a permit, a Commissioner must consider the need for a particular pesticide and whether a safer pesticide or better method of application could be used and still prove effective. CACs regulate pesticide use to prevent misapplication or drift, and possible contamination of people or the environment. CAC staffs also enforce regulations to protect ground and surface water from pesticide contamination. To accomplish this they may work with regional water boards and the State Water Resources Control Board. Some CACs serve as air pollution control officers for their counties.

Among a Commissioner's most important responsibilities is the investigation of pesticide-related illnesses and injuries. All reported pesticide-related illnesses and injuries are investigated by the commissioner in the county in which the illness occurred. CAC staff interview the victims and employer, if the illness occurred on the job. If violations of pesticide law or regulations are found to have contributed to an illness, the commissioner takes enforcement action. As part of the investigation, a CAC biologist may take residue samples for laboratory analysis.

In most counties, the CAC is the first contact on many farm-related issues. Commissioners enforce many laws administered by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), including those related to pest detection, eradication and exclusion, and to quality standards for fruits and vegetables. CDFA also provides biological control organisms that commissioners may use to solve significant pest problems. Additionally, CACs work with the State Department of Fish and Game to investigate wildlife losses associated with pesticides and to prevent agricultural runoff into wildlife areas.

Wide Range of Duties

Although in most counties they are called "agricultural" commissioners, CAC duties range far beyond the farm gate. For example, CAC employees check maintenance gardeners to ensure they are licensed to apply pesticides, and that their pesticides are labeled for professional landscaping. CAC biologists inspect home

pesticide applications, such as structural fumigations for termites, and check structural pest control employees for proper training and equipment.

Since many pesticides are used in non-agricultural settings – sanitizers in municipal water treatment plants, disinfecting chemicals in food service facilities and hospitals – pesticide laws may overlap other areas where workplace safety is involved. Therefore, CACs may also work with the State Departments of Industrial Relations and Health Services. Commissioners also consult with the State Department of Forestry and its federal counterpart about pesticide use on forest lands.

Outside the pesticide arena, County Agricultural Commissioners have a variety of responsibilities, including:

- Sampling imported produce at airports, seaports, and post offices for exotic pests such as the Mediterranean fruit fly. Also checked are shipments of nursery products from areas that may harbor unwanted pests.
- Inspecting nurseries and seed producers to check the viability of rootstock and seed, and inspecting beehives for disease and pest infestations.
- Checking for insect damage, rot and decay at packing stations; inspecting grapes, citrus, and other fruit for sugar content.
- Enforcing the state's organic food laws, and overseeing certified farmers' markets in their counties.
- Preparing an annual county crop report with statistics used by universities, agricultural organizations, lending institutions, and others.
- Ensuring equity in the marketplace by enforcing weights and measures laws and regulations. All but two commissioners also serve as county sealers, who check supermarket scales and gasoline pumps for accuracy.

If you have safety questions about pesticides, or have questions or concerns about how pesticides are being used in your county, you can find the phone number of your local Agricultural Commissioner in your local white pages, under county government headings, or on DPR's Web site at www.cdpr.ca.gov. There you will also find other informational handouts, including a fact sheet on how to file a pesticide complaint.

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Single copies of this handout are available by calling your Commissioner's office, from DPR at 916-445-3974, or can be downloaded from DPR's Web site, www.cdpr.ca.gov, "News and Publications," then to "Consumer Information."